

From the Office of Housing, Buildings and Construction

June 19, 2006

NOTICE

TO ALL OWNERS AND OPERATORS OF PUBLIC OR PRIVATE PARKING GARAGES

As a result of the tragic accident at a Lexington parking garage last month, the Office of Housing, Buildings and Construction (OHBC) recommends all owners and operators of public or private parking garages throughout the Commonwealth have qualified persons survey and inspect each parking garage for the presence of adequate and safe vehicle barrier systems. The overall condition of the structure should also be observed to determine if the structural steel or concrete has been exposed to the elements and deteriorated to the point that structural integrity may be compromised.

On May 16, 2006, a female pedestrian and her unborn child were killed after being struck by a pre-cast concrete wall panel that was dislodged from an upper parking level after being hit by a light truck. The accident is still under investigation and it is unknown whether today's more stringent code requirements would have prevented this tragedy. OHBC is working with Lexington and other local building officials to review these details along with the current code requirements for parking garages to determine if the requirements need to be strengthened.

The uniform, statewide building code has been adopted as a minimum construction standard for all new building construction and does not apply to existing buildings unless there is a change of occupancy or a new addition. The current building code is the 2002 edition of the Kentucky Building Code (KBC). The 2002 KBC is based on the International Building Code as published by the International Code Council and has been adopted by numerous states. While this code is not applicable to existing parking garages, it does have substantially more stringent requirements for parking garages built today than did codes of 10 years ago.

Adequate vehicle barrier protection is critically important and may vary depending on the type of construction and the structural design of the parking garage. Persons charged with surveying existing parking garages should look for the presence of wheel stops or wheel guards, concrete curbs, structural walls or guardrails that will prevent a passenger vehicle from coming in contact with the exterior wall. The current code requires these types of barriers where a drop-off of 1 foot or more exists. Vehicle barrier systems are required to resist a single load of 6,000 pounds applied horizontally in any direction to the barrier and have anchorage or attachment capable of transmitting this load to the structure.

OHBC considers a structural engineer the most qualified person for conducting the parking garage surveys. Other professionals, such as engineers, architects, building safety directors, loss prevention experts or state/local certified building inspectors are also considered qualified to make the initial parking garage survey. If significant safety issues are revealed during the initial survey, the surveyors should recommend the building owner and/or operator contract with a structural engineering company to perform a detailed evaluation of the structure.